DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 598 HE 017 991

TITLE	A Manual for the Evaluation Visit, 1984-85.
INSTITUTION	North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Chicago, IL. Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.
PUB DATE	1 Sep 84
NOTE	56p.; For related documents, see HE 017 989-990.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accreditation (Institutions); Accrediting Agencies; *Evaluation Criteria; Guidelines; *Higher Education; *Institutional Evaluation; Reports; *School Visitation; Self Evaluation (Groups)
IDENTIFIERS	Commission on Institutions of Higher Education; *North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; *Site Visits

ABSTRACT

A manual for accreditation visiting teams is presented that may also be used by colleges preparing for evaluation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. After describing the role of the visiting team in the Commission's accreditation activities and the selection of the team, steps in planning the visit are discussed. Suggestions for conducting the on-site visit cover areas such as data collection, team meetings, the exit interview, and expenses. Essential elements that should be addressed in writing the report, including the issues that should be covered in the report's recommendations, are also discussed. Attention is also directed to the team's role after the visit in the review processes of the Commission, and aspects of preparing for, conducting, and reporting on a focused evaluation, which is not empowered to make recommendations concerning candidacy or accreditation. The team's role, instead, is to evaluate the area(s) specified in the focus of the visit and to provide a progress report on developments at the college. Included are: a sample evaluation visit summary sheet, a planning checklist for the team chairperson, a sample worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, and a sample title page for the team report. (SW)

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A MANUAL FOR THE EVALUATION VISIT

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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

1984-85

HE 017 811

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North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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1984

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PREFACE

"If," Plato wrote in the *Timaeus*, "amid the many opinions about the gods and the generation of the universe we are not able to render all of our ideas consistent with each other and precisely accurate, no one need be surprised . . . for we must remember that I who speak and you who judge are mortal men, so that on these subjects we should be satisfied with a likely story and demand nothing more." Faced with the responsibility of evaluating an institution for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, most visiting teams sooner or later come to realize the wisdom of these words. For while the judgments they must make may not be quite as weighty as those Plato mentions, they too can only produce a "likely story" of what they have found.

The staff of the Commission has prepared this 1984-85 edition of its *Manual for the Evaluation Visit* to guide teams in their work. Together with the *Handbook of Accreditation* and *A Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation*, it provides team chairpersons, team members, and institutions with a detailed description of the principles, policies and procedures which currently govern the Commission's accreditation process. Like each of the other publications, it incorporates the still-current information from a variety of past Commission documents and introduces changes that have recently been adopted. Like the *Handbook* and the *Guide*, the *Manual* is revised and republished annually. The *Handbook* is the core of this set of documents, and both this *Manual* and the *Guide* assume their reader's familiarity with it. The *Manual* is primarily addressed to the Commission's consultant-evaluators, but it is also intended for use by institutions preparing for evaluation by the Commission.

The Introduction describes the crucial role of the visiting team in the Commission's accreditation activities. Chapter II provides a step-by-step description of the early and thorough planning that is an integral part of every successful visit. Chapter III offers suggestions about conducting the on-site visit, and refers teams to the *Guide* for further information on the specific questions they will want to ask as they go about evaluating an institution in relation to the Commission's Criteria for Candidacy or Criteria for Accreditation. Chapter IV treats the Team Report. (While the report is ultimately written by the team chair, all members of the team will need to be fully conversant with the information this chapter contains since they are responsible for drafting sections of the report and submitting them to the chair.) *Since team chairpersons are now asked to organize their reports—and especially their recommendations—in a recently revised format, this chapter should be read with special care.* Chapter V describes the team's role after the visit in the review processes of the Commission. Chapter VI discusses all of the aspects of preparing for, conducting and reporting a focused evaluation which differ from those for comprehensive evaluations. All evaluators and institutions will want to read the entire *Manual*; those involved in focused evaluations will need to read Chapter VI with special care and attention.

The staff of the Commission hopes that this *Manual*, together with the *Handbook* and *Guide*, will answer most of the questions visiting team members and chairpersons will have about this process. Please contact us if they do not.

I. Introduction

The Consultant-Evaluator Corps

When the Commission chose to base its evaluation of institutions of higher education on qualitative criteria rather than quantitative standards, it made its consultant-evaluator corps the indispensable thread that binds its accreditation process together. For at every step in that process these educators from throughout the North Central region offer their time and expertise to render the judgments and establish the policies which embody the Commission's purposes of certification and institutional improvement. As members of on-site visiting teams, they examine institutional effectiveness, provide advice and counsel, and recommend accrediting actions; as North Central Commissioners-at-Large, they serve on Readers' Panels and Review Committees; as Executive Commissioners, they take official action in the name of the Commission. Drawn from large institutions and small, from old ones and new; from private institutions and public, church-related and non-denominational; from vocational-technical institutes, community and junior colleges, four-year colleges, professional schools and universities; from towns of five hundred and cities of several million, they are as diverse as American higher education itself. So diverse, in fact, that they make genuine peer review of institutions of higher education within the North Central region a reality rather than a catchphrase. Yet for all their differences, the members of the consultant-evaluator corps are similar in their willingness to give generously of their time and expertise, their dedication to educational excellence, and their commitment to the principles underlying voluntary accreditation.

The corps currently numbers about seven hundred members. Each year roughly fifty new educators are invited to join them in their work.

The Selection of the Visiting Team

For several years prior to most comprehensive on-site visits, the institution and the staff of the Commission have been making preparations. The institution has engaged in an intensive self-study, and has organized its

findings into a written report; the staff of the Commission has assisted it in that process. Together, they have established a plan for the self-study, worked out a timetable, and set the dates for the on-site visit.

During the year before the visit, the institution was asked to indicate the areas of expertise and kinds of institutions it thought should be represented on its visiting team. With those suggestions in mind, the staff member working with the institution attempted to compose a well-balanced team from among the members of the consultant-evaluator corps. (In exceptional cases where an institutional evaluation requires professional background that no current member of the corps has, the staff may have suggested educators from outside of the corps to serve on a particular visiting team.) The staff member developed the proposed team within certain Commission guidelines—normally, no member of the team will have visited the institution before as a North Central evaluator; no member of the team will be from the institution's own state. While it is possible that some members of the visiting team will find they know one another or have served together on other teams, and some may even know a few people at the institution being visited, it is just as likely that the team members will be meeting and working with one another for the first time.

The staff member sent the proposed team to the institution for comment and then invited the team members to serve. If subsequent changes in the team had to be made, they were also made in consultation with the institution.

Each visiting team, then, has been painstakingly selected so that it can thoroughly and objectively perform its vital role in the Commission's accreditation process.

The Role of the Visiting Team

That role is both clear and complex: in comprehensive evaluations it is to evaluate the institution to determine whether it fulfills the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation, and to recommend on the basis of that evaluation that accreditation or candidacy be granted, continued or denied. The seriousness of this responsibility, its importance to a great many people both within and outside of the institution, hardly needs to be emphasized. In conjunction with its evaluation and recommendation, the visiting team offers any advice or suggestions that its members believe may help the institution to improve its effectiveness.

The visiting team is charged neither with enforcing government regulations nor with measuring an institution against a uniform set of standards or preconceptions. Instead, it is asked to exercise its collective judgment to assess an institution's clarity of purpose, organization of resources, educational effectiveness, and ability to continue to function. The team begins with *the institution's own stated mission and purposes* as a postsecondary educational institution, and evaluates how that mission and those purposes are being realized. Approaching each institution on its own terms, in other words, the team evaluates it in relation to the Commission's Criteria (see *Handbook*, pp. 8-20).

When it has completed its evaluation, the team formulates its accrediting recommendation and summarizes its findings in a written Team Report. Like the institutional self-study report to which it is, in part, a reaction, this Team Report must contain certain essential elements (see Chapter IV). And, like the institutional self-study report, the team's report becomes a crucial part of the written record which members of the Commission's review process, Executive Commissioners, and members of the next visiting team to the institution consider in making their own recommendations and decisions.

To evaluate. To advise. To recommend. To report. These are the responsibilities of the visiting team. To fulfill them well, the team's chair and the team's members must see that the visit is as carefully planned and conducted as their report is carefully written.

The Commission Staff and the Team Visit

Just as the staff provide assistance to institutions in preparing for the evaluation, they also provide assistance as needed to team chairs and team members. Well before the visit is conducted, the team chair should indicate to the staff any questions about the size and/or competencies of the team. During the visit, the team chair should feel free to contact the Commission office to clarify Commission policy, to discuss unique situations, and/or to confirm that the team is accurately describing the Commission's processes. In preparing the Team Report, the team chair might seek advice from the Commission staff concerning its organization and content. The team chair is asked to send copies of any correspondence related to the evaluation to the Commission staff person assigned to the institution.

Because the Commission believes that the accreditation process must be based on the principle of peer review, a member of the Commission staff only infrequently joins an on-site visiting team, and then only as an observer and with the institution's approval.

II. Planning The Visit

Contacting the Institution

Once visiting team members have accepted an evaluation assignment, the Commission formally notifies the institution and the team chair and distributes an **Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet** and a **Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status** to the chief executive officer and each of the team members. These documents provide a capsule description of both the institution and the visit. The **Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet** includes the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the chief executive officer, the members of the team, and the Commission staff person coordinating the evaluation; the **Worksheet** describes the institution's current status with the Commission and provides space for the institution to request changes in that status, for the team to enter its recommendation, for the reviewers to note their recommendations, and for the Executive Commissioners to record the final Commission action.

The team chair then contacts the chief executive officer and the team members to begin making plans for the visit. (Team members should not contact the institution individually.) Together, the chairperson and the CEO determine if a pre-visit is necessary, identify the key people at the institution who will be interviewed during the team visit, make arrangements for the team's hotel accommodations, agree on the materials and facilities that will be at the team's disposal while they are on campus, and discuss any other aspects of the visit that need to be worked out beforehand.

Arranging a Pre-Visit

If special features about an institution or its evaluation appear to require extensive pre-planning before the team visit, the chairperson and the CEO may decide that a pre-visit is desirable. Such visits normally last only one day. The chairperson makes the final decision about conducting a pre-visit after consulting with the staff of the Commission. The institution is billed for the cost of the pre-visit by the Commission office according to its schedule of fees (see *Handbook*, pp. 39-40). The Commission

sends the team chair making a pre-visit an expense voucher.

A pre-visit is devoted to establishing the details of the on-site evaluation plan. The chairperson talks with administrators, faculty and students to get a clear impression of the institution, to examine its logistical or programmatic particularities, and to develop a sense of its atmosphere and style so that the on-site team can later approach its evaluation with a minimum of lost time and a maximum of effectiveness.

Ideally, the team chair reviews the institution's self-study report before or during the pre-visit to determine whether any additional information may be needed by the team. The chairperson also checks on practical arrangements for the visit and confirms appointments with members of the institution's state or local governing board(s).

As soon as the pre-visit is finished, the team chair mails an expense voucher for the trip to the Commission office for reimbursement. At the same time, the chairperson should contact the staff member coordinating the evaluation if the pre-visit has indicated that there may be significant omissions or imbalances in the team or if preparations for the evaluation appear to be at variance with the information the Commission has provided.

Preparing for the Visit

In addition to an Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet, the chairperson of the visiting team also receives Professional Data Forms on each of the team members. These forms provide information about the background and competencies of each member of the team.

The team chair should write to the team members to inform them of preliminary arrangements for the visit. Throughout the planning process, the team chair should also keep the rest of the team informed of how arrangements are progressing. Team members will need information about when they should arrive, where they will be housed, the time and place of their first team meeting, when they can expect to finish their work, and a variety of other practical matters. The team chair should also use the information the Commission has provided on each consultant-evaluator to work on a tentative evaluation plan and division of responsibilities for the visit. If the team includes a new member of the corps, the chair

should arrange for that person to work with more experienced members of the team.

Since each member's familiarity with Commission policies and procedures will differ, one of the chairperson's major responsibilities throughout the visit will be to orient the team to the Commission's philosophy and practices. The *Handbook of Accreditation, Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation,* and this *Manual* are required reading for every team member; in addition, the staff of the Commission may also distribute specific policy statements which apply to a particular evaluation visit. The team chair must serve as the on-site guide for the application and interpretation of these documents as bases for the evaluation and recommendation of the team.

As the date of the visit approaches, the team chair may write to the team members again to assign specific areas of the institution for each one's special attention. However, the chair should stress that *each* team member is to become familiar with *all* of the institution's written materials before the visit takes place.

Analyzing the Written Materials

At least one month before the date of the on-site visit, **the institution sends directly to each member of the team:** a copy of its report, a set of completed Basic Institutional Data Forms, a copy of the latest institutional catalog(s), and copies of the institution's faculty and student handbooks. The office of the Commission sends each of them the Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet, a copy of the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status, the report of the last comprehensive visit and copies of the reports of any focused visits that have taken place since the last comprehensive evaluation, a brief history of the institution's relationship with the Commission since its last comprehensive evaluation, and an expense voucher for the visit. The institution also places in an office set aside on campus a variety of additional materials that will be of use to the visiting team during their evaluation, including: information about its governing board, charter, and degree-granting authorities; minutes of Board meetings; the bylaws and statutes of the institution; the current year's budget; major institutional reports and records; collective bargaining agreements, and information on faculty, teaching loads, and student activities (see *Handbook,* pp. 37-38).

Before the visit, the members of the visiting team carefully examine all of the materials they have received from the institution and the Commission. The institution's written self-study report is especially important as a primary source of information for the evaluation. Since this report reflects the design of a self-study process that has usually taken many months, it is important that each member of the team understand the nature of that design. For while every *evaluation* for initial or continued candidacy or accreditation is comprehensive, the *self-study report* may be framed in a variety of ways. The report may be comprehensive, comprehensive with certain emphases, or topical. It may also be built around a current special institutional study or around documents that have been produced by a regular institutional research program. The staff of the Commission will make any peculiarities of the self-study design known to the team, and the institution will describe them in the report itself.

It is also important for the team to remember that its charge is to evaluate the *institution*, not just the report. A poor self-study report may make a team's task more difficult, but it does not necessarily mean that an institution does not fulfill the Criteria; a well-written self-study report is not a substitute for fulfilling the Criteria.

Yet the self-study report will inevitably be the team's touchstone during the visit, since the report is required to demonstrate clearly and explicitly that the institution satisfies the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation. As they read it before the visit, the chairperson and the team members will want to ask themselves a number of questions, including:

- Does the report show that the institution has engaged in genuine, broadly-based self-study?
- Do the parts of the report fit together?
- Does the report contain the three essential elements required by the Commission (see *Guide*, pp. 18-20)?
- Is the accreditation history followed by the SAS Worksheet? Have the institution's requests for changes in its SAS been noted on the Worksheet?
- Is the report sufficiently evaluative, or is it merely descriptive?
- Does it adequately demonstrate that the institution fulfills *each* of the Criteria for Candidacy or

Accreditation (including the General Institutional Requirements and the Evaluative Criteria)? If it does not, what further information is required? What needs amplification, clarification, or special examination?

- Are there any inconsistencies between the information in the report and that in the Basic Institutional Data forms, the catalog(s), or the faculty or student handbooks?
- Are there any inconsistencies between the information in the report and that included in the materials the team has received from the Commission?
- Who are the key people to interview?
- What functions, operations, or program areas deserve special attention?
- What strengths and concerns about the institution does the self-study report suggest? Is there a plan (of action) for responding to the concerns?

The team will also need to read all of the materials sent by the Commission, paying special attention to any background information which may be provided by the staff, the report(s) of the previous visiting team(s), and the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status. The reports of the last comprehensive evaluation and any subsequent focused evaluations will provide a basis for judging the rate and the character of the changes the institution has undergone; and recommending a revised Statement of Affiliation Status will be one of the team's primary tasks during the visit.

After examining all of these materials before the visit, the team should be prepared to approach its first team meeting with a clear idea of questions and areas it will want to discuss and examine during the evaluation.

SAMPLE 8/15/84
1234E

NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
159 North Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60601

EVALUATION VISIT SUMMARY SHEET

INSTITUTION:	John Dewey College 1100 South State Street Chicago, IL 60605
EXECUTIVE OFFICER:	Dr. Jane E. Jones, President (312) 942-6060 Ext. 25
SELF-STUDY COORDINATOR:	Dr. Steven J. Doe, Academic Dean (Ext. 20)
STATE COORDINATING/ GOVERNING OR OTHER RELATED AGENCY:	N/A
ENROLLMENT:	FTE: 600
TYPE OF EVALUATION:	A comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation at the Master's (professional) degree-granting level.

DATE OF VISIT:	October 8-10, 1984	LENGTH OF VISIT:	3 days
DRAFT REPORT DUE:	November 7, 1984	NCA STAFF:	Dr. Charles M. Hall (800) 621-7440 (312) 263-0456
FINAL REPORT DUE:	November 21, 1984		
COMMISSION ACTION:	February 21-23, 1985	EVALUATION FEE:	$4350.00

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A PLANNING CHECKLIST FOR THE TEAM CHAIRPERSON

Contact the chief executive officer to

_____ determine if a pre-visit is necessary
if it is: _____ notify the Commission staff person
_____ arrange the pre-visit
_____ conduct the pre-visit

_____ request that the institution
_____ make hotel reservations
_____ reserve a team meeting room at the hotel, if possible
_____ provide a meeting room for the team on campus
_____ set aside in the team's meeting room on campus the materials specified on p. 37 of *A Handbook of Accreditation*
_____ provide secretarial assistance, if possible
_____ arrange for early meetings during the visit with

- members of the governing board
- representatives of the state coordinating board or other related agency
- faculty representatives
- student representatives
- alumni and community leaders

_____ announce the visit and the availability of the team to confer with institutional personnel during "open time"
_____ make certain that all key personnel are available during the visit
_____ mail all institutional materials to the team one month before the visit

Contact team members to

_____ notify them of hotel and other arrangements
_____ schedule the first team meeting
_____ share preliminary evaluation plan
_____ make tentative assignments of areas of special responsibility, including report writing
_____ request that they review the *Handbook of Accreditation, Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation,* and *Manual for the Evaluation Visit,* and that they bring these documents with them to the institution

Send copies of all correspondence to the Commission staff member working with the institution and the team.

III. Conducting The On-Site Visit

The First Team Meeting

An evaluation for initial or continued accreditation or initial candidacy normally lasts three days; a visit for continued candidacy usually lasts two. The day before the visit is to begin and the last day of the visit are partially devoted to travel to and from the institution; the rest of the visit is totally spent on the institutional evaluation. Team members are expected to stay the full number of days scheduled for the visit, and to depart shortly after the exit interview. However, if circumstances warrant it, the team chair may extend the visit beyond its scheduled length after consulting with the Commission staff.

Team members usually arrive during the afternoon or evening of the day before the visit is officially slated to begin. The team chairperson will have earlier notified each of them of the time of the initial team meeting. Together, the chairperson and the chief executive officer will have decided either to arrange an informal dinner for the team to meet representatives of the institution or to leave the first evening free for the team to begin its work without other commitments. If a social function is scheduled, it should be both early and brief.

At the team's first business meeting, the chairperson should review the detailed plans for the visit, establish final assignments, and make each team member's report writing responsibility clear. The team should plan to interview a representative sample of the institution's administrators, division/department heads, faculty, and students. Often, group interviews conducted by individual team members are the most efficient way to talk to as many people as possible.

The team chair should also use the first business meeting to clarify the team's task, concentrate its attention, and

establish a unified attitude toward the evaluation. The team members should be encouraged to approach their work informally, as colleagues and peers rather than as inspectors. They should keep their attention on evaluating the institution in relation to the Criteria and should avoid trivial detours. To see only flaws and weaknesses, or to compare everything to one's home campus, will distort the evaluation and distract the team from its central responsibility of approaching the institution in terms of *its own* objectives. ("Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits," Mark Twain once observed.)

With these ideas and objectives in mind, the team chair usually establishes an agenda for the first meeting that looks something like this:

- **Orientation.** Review the Criteria (in the *Handbook*), the *Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation*, and this *Manual* and the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. Remind the team that all evaluation materials, conferences, conclusions and recommendations are to be kept confidential.
- **Preliminary Impressions.** Have an open exchange of preliminary reactions to the written materials the team has studied. Allow each member of the team to share his or her analysis of the materials and identify any areas of conflicting opinion. Guard against *a priori* conclusions, but use this discussion to establish working hypotheses as points of departure for the team's first day of work.
- **Planning.** Plan individual and team activities and establish a tentative timetable for each day. Assign individual responsibilities for interviews. During most evaluations, every officer of the institution, every division/department head, and as many faculty members as possible should be consulted. In a small institution, every faculty member should talk to some member of the team and as many students as possible should also be interviewed. The team will usually want to schedule and publicize some "open time" when team members will be available to speak to anyone who wants to see them. At team meetings throughout the visit, the team chair will want to check on the team's progress in interviewing campus people so that as many people as possible are seen and no one who *must* be seen is omitted.
- **Commission Policy.** Remind team members not to let themselves be drawn into debates on the

relative merits of specific approaches to particular problems. As representatives of the Commission, they should make it clear that the Commission does not prescribe specific practices concerning such issues as unionization, collective bargaining, academic freedom, teaching loads, class size, or departmental budgets. Whatever their own personal biases may be, as representatives of the Commission team members should be neither advocates nor adversaries of any particular approach to these issues. Instead, they should make it clear that the Commission will examine such practices if these practices affect the institution's ability to meet the Commission's Criteria. If certain persons at the institution express particularly strong or singular views regarding the impact of a particular practice on the institution's effectiveness, their opinions should be cross-checked and verified by talking to others.

- **The Report.** Compiling the final report is the chairperson's responsibility, but team members are expected to draft those parts of the report that the chairperson assigns them. For the evaluation process to function on schedule, each team member must complete the writing he or she has been asked to do thoroughly and promptly. Do not assume that all team members already understand these expectations. Instead, inform them of how this report will be handled. Some chairpersons prefer to have a rough draft of the Team Report completed before they leave campus, others request that sections be submitted within a week of the visit. Should the chairperson wish to have the sections of the draft report in hand by the end of the visit, the team should be notified of this at the outset. The team chair may suggest that, while rough drafts are to be submitted by the end of the visit, anyone who wishes to write a more polished version for submission after he or she returns home is welcome to do so. But if the chair wants to have a draft report in hand before leaving the campus, it will be necessary to encourage team members to record their reactions, questions, and judgments *throughout* the visit rather than waiting until the end.

The Initial Conference with the CEO

The team's first conference on the morning the visit officially begins should be with the Chief Executive Officer of the institution and anyone else the CEO may choose to invite. The CEO will want to welcome the team, make some opening remarks about the institution and the visit, and perhaps introduce several key members of the

administrative staff; the team chair will want to introduce the members of the team. But this meeting should be more than a social occasion; it establishes the tenor of the visit. The CEO should be prepared to answer any initial questions the team may want to pose, and the team should be prepared to pose them. The Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status should be reviewed. It is also useful for the team chair to state officially why the team is there (e.g., "to conduct a comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the bachelor's degree-granting level") in order to make certain that there is no confusion about this. If confusion does exist, the chairperson should contact the staff of the Commission immediately. The team may also use this meeting to begin to schedule appointments with various members of the administration, faculty, staff, and governing board, if this has not already been done.

Throughout the on-site visit, one of the team chairperson's responsibilities is to maintain contact with the CEO and to make sure that the institution is satisfied with the way the visit is being conducted.

Gathering Data

While the variety of institutions evaluated by visiting teams prohibits establishing any single, fixed procedure for gathering the data necessary to determine whether an institution fulfills the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation, some general principles should guide every team as it goes about its on-site work.

- The team's focus should be on evaluating the institution *as a whole*. Therefore, the team needs to make sure that it has information about the entire institution. Occasionally institutions will overlook providing information in their self-study report on some activities; the team should make sure that it gathers this information during the visit. The most commonly overlooked aspects of an institution are its off-campus programs, including its study abroad offerings, the intercollegiate athletics program, special programs only offered at certain times of the year (such as summers), and the institution's relationship to affiliated but separate organizations—in short, those activities that fall outside of the immediate day-to-day concerns of many persons on the main campus.
- Since the collection of data about an institution could be endless, the team needs to determine

the extent and the kinds of data it must have to make its evaluation. This determination should be based on the level of detail appropriate to the judgment to be rendered—a judgment on the institution as a whole rather than on every single activity within it. The financial condition of the institution is important, for example, but the information the team needs about finances typically can be found in summary audit reports rather than in extensive examination of every item of expenditure.

- If the institution has a procedure for accomplishing a particular task, the team's responsibility is to examine the procedure and its application in a few cases, not to examine each application individually as if a guiding procedure were not in place.
- The most effective way to obtain the necessary information in the limited time of the team visit is by sampling. Some examples of data gathering in which such sampling may be appropriate include:
  - examining the credentials of faculty members to draw conclusions about the qualifications of the faculty as a whole;
  - examining student records to determine whether the institution follows its stated admissions policies;
  - selecting students and faculty to be interviewed to be sure that a cross-section of views are made known to the team;
  - examining library holdings to reach a conclusion about their adequacy to the institution's programs;
  - examining records of the accomplishments of graduates to reach a conclusion about the success of the institution in accomplishing its objectives;
  - examining student papers, theses and dissertations to reach a conclusion about the standards to which students are held for the award of degrees.

In many cases, the team will determine that adequate information about various aspects of the institution appears in its self-study report and related documents. In such cases, informal verification of some of that information by sampling will often allow the team to use the rest of the self-study with confidence in its correctness and completeness. There is, after all, no point in the team's

trying to collect for itself information that is already available in the institution's written documents; nor is there any point in its collecting information that does not bear on its assessment of the institution in relation to the Criteria.

Evaluating the Institution

The team's purpose in gathering all of this data is, of course, to evaluate whether the institution satisfies the Criteria for Candidacy or Accreditation. The Commission's *Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation* and *A Handbook of Accreditation* provide further information about the questions that need to be asked and the judgments that need to be made to make this determination.

Team Meetings

The chairperson should organize each team meeting carefully, deciding in advance what needs to be accomplished each time. Each meeting will usually include brief reports from team members on the areas they have been examining and discussion of those areas by the entire team. The team chair should encourage such discussion while assuring that everyone sticks to the point. Since the team's time is limited, it should not be wasted.

A major strength of every evaluation is the exchange that goes on within the team's meetings. Team members pool their experiences and resources, stimulate and question one another, search and argue, until points are clear and consensus has been reached. In most cases, the team will make its decisions through such consensus rather than through fiat or majority vote. And part of the reason for having the team lodged in the same place is that proximity facilitates the exchange of ideas, opinion and information necessary to reach such consensus.

The team chair should make sure that the team meetings are run efficiently and ended at a reasonable time. A closing hour for evening meetings should be probably be set and honored. At each meeting before the last, the team should review its progress and, if necessary, revise the remainder of its schedule to pursue issues that need further clarification.

At the final team conference, the team seeks to agree on the proposed content of its report and to reach consensus on its formal recommendation. In the rare case where such agreement and consensus are unattainable, one or more team members may wish to file a minority report of their own. (The kinds of recommendations a team may

make, and the proper wording for each, and the use of the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status are discussed in the next chapter.)

Since the team chairperson is responsible for writing the Team Report in a very limited time, it is critical that he or she have rough drafts of each section of the report either before or shortly after the visit ends. If the chairperson chooses not to require that the entire report be written before leaving campus, he or she should make clear at this meeting the date when all sections are to be submitted. Team members should realize that many institutions schedule their evaluations so that they may have Commission action at a particular time. It is critical, therefore, that team reports be completed on schedule, and that team members cooperate with their chairperson by submitting their portions of the report on time.

The team chair's responsibility is to compose a final report that conveys, *without modification*, the team's recommendation and its rationale for that recommendation. Thus, the chair must clearly understand what that recommendation and that rationale are.

Finally, at the last team meeting the team should prepare for the exit interview with the institution's officers. It should agree on the strengths and concerns it wishes to emphasize, on whether the team chair or the various members of the team will present the team's views, and on what its recommendation will be.

The Exit Interview

Before leaving campus the entire team meets with the CEO (and others the CEO chooses to have present) to summarize its findings and report its recommendation. This exit interview should provide the institution with an oral preview of *all the major points* that will be made in the team's written report.

The team begins by outlining the strengths and concerns it has observed at the institution. It concludes by reporting what its recommendation to the Commission will be and explaining how it will fill in the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status.

It is imperative that both the content and the tone of this oral report be consistent with the written report the institution will later receive. The oral report should leave no doubt about

the team's judgments and, after it, the written report should hold no surprises.

The team must accurately report what its joint recommendation will be. Should the recommendation be negative, this may well be the most difficult part of the entire visit for all concerned. But the team must clearly inform the institution of its recommendation, however discomforting doing so may be. It should also emphasize that its recommendation is precisely that—a recommendation—and that it may be changed by the review processes or by the Commission.

When the team's oral report is completed, the chief executive officer may raise questions about it. If the CEO or other administrators believe that the team has been misinformed or has misunderstood something important, they should say so, and the team should be prepared to double-check if its facts are questioned. However, both the team and the institution's representatives should avoid turning the interview into a debate. The institution will be given an opportunity to file a formal, written response to the final Team Report, and that response is the proper place for challenging the team's interpretations or judgments. Based on the team's presentation in the exit interview, the institution should have enough information to begin preparing some of that response even before it receives the written report.

If the interview raises important, unresolved questions, the team may need to reconvene following it to reconsider some aspect of its report or recommendation. If necessary, it should take further time to clarify its position or make sure of its facts and, in extremely difficult cases, it may be necessary for the team to extend its stay so that it can gather and assess the additional information it needs. Normally, however, after the exit interview the team will conclude its work and leave for home.

Expenses

Each institution is assessed an evaluation fee which covers the entire cost of the expenses and honoraria associated with its visit. Team members receive expense vouchers before the visit. They are asked to pay their own travel, hotel, and meal expenses during the visit, and then to submit their expense vouchers to the office of the Commission when they return to their home campuses. Expenses should **not** be billed to the institution or directly to the Commission.

IV. Writing The Team Report

The team chair composes the evaluation report. Although the chairperson will draw heavily on the comments, ideas, and rough drafts of the other team members, the chair is not limited to cutting and pasting. Instead, he or she is responsible for writing a clear, concise, well-organized, and coherent document that will stand up under the careful scrutiny of a wide variety of readers. The team chair must honestly reflect the views of the team, and should indicate (without identifying individuals) any significant disagreements within it. All of the major points made in the team's oral report at the exit interview should be included in the written report.

The draft report should be written as soon as possible after the visit, before the details and the tenor of the visit dim. While writing, the chairperson should remember that the report is intended for a large audience—the staff of the Commission, the Commissioners-at-Large who will take part in the review process, the Executive Commissioners, the chief executive officer and others at the institution, the members of subsequent visiting teams, et al. The report should, therefore, be both honest and tactful. (It should not mention individuals, for example, but should refer to positions: "the Academic Dean," not "Dean Jones.")

With the initiation of the Statement of Affiliation Status, the Commission changed the format of team reports. Therefore, team chairs and team members should **not** use pre-1982 team reports as models.

The Four Essential Elements

Since each institution is unique and every institution is evaluated for candidacy or accreditation in the light of its own mission and purposes, every report is different. But since each evaluation is conducted to examine an institution for the same accrediting purposes and in relation to a common set of Criteria, each report must also contain four

essential elements. To fulfill its role in the accreditation process, **every report must:**

- provide certain matters of information
- offer advice and suggestions to the institution
- specifically evaluate the institution in relation to the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation (including the General Institutional Requirements and the Evaluative Criteria)
- conclude with the team's formal recommendation and its rationale for that recommendation.

The clearest way to address these four essential elements is to divide the team report into four corresponding sections.

The First Essential Element

The first essential element of every Team Report is a clear introduction which provides certain matters of information that give the reader a context within which to read what follows. This introduction describes:

- the organization of the report
- the accreditation history of the institution, and
- the scope and structure of this team visit

The introduction should outline the organization of the Team Report by explaining that it is divided into four parts and describing what each of those parts contains.

Next, the introduction should summarize the institution's accreditation history. The Commission sends each visiting team a summary of this history before the visit; this history should also be described in the institution's self-study report. The introduction to the Team Report need not rehearse every detail of the accreditation history of the institution—especially if the institution has long been affiliated with the Commission—but it should specify when the institution first became affiliated with the Commission, when it was first accredited, when it last underwent a comprehensive evaluation, and what (if any) focused evaluations have been conducted since the last comprehensive evaluation.

The introduction should also briefly review how the visit was conducted (i.e., people interviewed, documents reviewed, etc.). This need not be an exhaustive list of names or offices, but should give solid evidence of the completeness of the review.

Finally, the introduction should outline the scope of the visit being described in the team report. This scope has been defined by the last official action of the Commission, and is specified in both the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status and the Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet which the team received before the visit. This section of the introduction might say that "this is the report of a comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the master's degree-granting level which was conducted for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education on October 8-10, 1984."

The Second Essential Element

As consultants as well as evaluators, visiting teams are asked to offer advice and suggestions to institutions as well as to evaluate them in relation to the Criteria. The second essential element of the Team Report is a section devoted to such suggestions and advice. *This section should be clearly separate from the team's evaluation of the institution in relation to the Criteria. It should be explicitly stated that the section is advisory, and that making any changes or improvements mentioned in it is not a requirement of the institution's candidacy or accreditation.* Concerns that affect the institution's ability to fulfill the Criteria belong in the third section of the report; suggested changes that do not directly relate to the institution's accreditation or candidacy status belong in the second.

In the past, the distinction between these two sections has often caused confusion about what an institution has *had* to do in order to gain or maintain its candidacy or accreditation. Because of this history of confusion, the team chair is asked to be especially careful and clear in labeling and separating the team's advice and suggestions from its evaluation of the institution in terms of the Criteria.

As experienced educators, team members can often offer valuable counsel to an institution. As outsiders, they can sometimes bring an objective perspective to bear on a difficulty that the institution has not been able to clarify for itself. Teams are encouraged to offer this counsel and perspective whenever they can, and to think about this section of the Team Report during their meetings on campus.

Obviously, a team's suggestions vary with the institution it visits, and few general guidelines can be provided by the Commission for what should be included in this section. But the Commission does suggest that the team

chairperson prepare it with a few words of caution in mind.

- Avoid rhetorical questions (e.g., "the organization of the college requires the president to make all decisions. Is this really satisfactory?"). Either raise concerns directly (e.g., "The organizational structure of the college does not provide line officers with enough decision-making authority") or make clear suggestions for change (e.g., "We suggest that the college's organizational plan place explicit responsibility for day-to-day decisions with the line officers, and that the president should review the effects of those decisions each month").

- Avoid comments and suggestions concerning personalities within the institution ("The president's administrative style is interesting and unconventional"), even when the comments are laudatory ("the Dean of Students is doing an excellent job"). The short duration of the team visit does not really allow the team to arrive at a thorough knowledge of the activities of most individuals within the institution, so it is better to relate comments and suggestions to organizational elements within the institution ("There appears to be a good rapport between student leaders and the office of the Dean of Students").

- Avoid prescribing—as opposed to suggesting—specific solutions to problems ("The student personnel office is overworked, and an Associate Dean of Students should be appointed immediately"). It is appropriate to identify problems, but the specific solutions should be left to the discretion of the institution itself. In addition, such specific prescriptions are the elements of advice that are most often confused with accreditation requirements by institutions and readers.

The Third Essential Element

The third essential element of every Team Report for candidacy or accreditation is an explicit evaluation of whether the institution fulfills the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation (see Chapters II-IV of the *Handbook*). This section of the report—the longest and most detailed—provides the essential information the Commission needs to make its accrediting decision.

The report must address each of the parts of the Criteria for Candidacy or Accreditation—the thirteen General

Institutional Requirements and the four appropriate Evaluative Criteria--citing factual information pertaining to each. It needs to be emphasized that *both* the General Institutional Requirements *and* the Evaluative Criteria must be discussed in every report. Review of the GIRs is particularly important in evaluations for initial and continued candidacy and initial accreditation.

In documenting that an institution does or does not satisfy the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation, the Team Report must provide information on the areas of processes and outcomes identified in the *Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation.* Specifically, it must examine the institution's mission and purposes, its resources and their organization, its programs and their success, and its plans for the future. And to do this, it will need to discuss relevant details.

On the other hand, the Team Report need not *repeat* all of the information which relates to the Criteria that is contained in the institution's self-study report, catalogs, and other materials. In some cases, the team will need to provide extended discussion and documentation to support its conclusions; in others, it will be able to refer readers to other institutional documents and briefly summarize what can be found there. In other words, the Team Report need not be a totally self-contained document, but it must clearly summarize the evidence supporting the team's judgments about every part of the Criteria.

The key point for the team chair to remember as he or she writes this section of the report is that it will be crucial to the Commission's review process after the on-site visit; therefore, it must be clear and thorough enough to justify the team's recommendation.

There is no prescribed format for the organization of this section of the report (although the *Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation* suggests the areas that need to be examined to demonstrate that an institution fulfills the Commission's Evaluative Criteria.) A device that many teams use to present a clear summary of their findings in this section is to list the strengths and concerns pertaining to each of the parts of the Criteria. "Strengths" are those aspects of the institution that the team regards as especially valuable and pertinent to demonstrating the institution's fulfillment of the Criteria. "Concerns" are those aspects of the

institution that the team believes require early consideration for improvement and change, and that reflect negatively on the institution's fulfillment of the Criteria. "Strengths" are emphasized both to commend the institution for them and to encourage it not to let them be weakened; "concerns" are emphasized to indicate those areas which, though they may be currently adequate, need to be strengthened and improved. Both "strengths" and "concerns" should be significant and related to the Criteria.

On the basis of its evaluation of the institution *as a whole*, the team will recommend accrediting action. If the team has identified certain deficiencies that make it impossible to certify that the institution adequately fulfills the Criteria, it must state those deficiencies clearly in this section of its report. If it believes that, in spite of major deficiencies, *on balance* the institution fulfills the Criteria, it must make clear how the institution's strengths outweigh its deficiencies. This section of the report, in other words, should support the recommendation the team makes; careful examination must not find them to be inconsistent.

The Fourth Essential Element

The fourth essential element of every Team Report is the team's recommendation of Commission action and its rationale for that recommendation. This final section of the report should now have three related parts:

- a brief, standard recommendation sentence
- a rationale, and
- a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status

The Recommendation Sentence. The team's recommendation is to be divided into two parts: a recommendation sentence and an attached Statement Worksheet.

The recommendation sentence, which is to begin the final section of the Team Report, should follow one of two simple models. A positive recommendation sentence for a comprehensive evaluation should read:

> **The team's recommendations for action, including its recommendation to (grant/continue) the (candidacy/accreditation) of College X, are shown on**

the attached Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. The team's reasons for its recommendations are:

A negative recommendation sentence for a comprehensive evaluation should read:

The team recommends that the (candidacy/accreditation) of College X be denied/withdrawn) for the following reasons:

The Rationale. The recommendation sentence is to be followed by a section in which the team clearly states its reasons for each of its specific recommendations. The team does this by discussing its suggested version of each part of the Statement of Affiliation Status. If the team's recommendation is that a part of the current Statement remain the same, it will briefly state that that part of the Statement is still accurate. (The *Status* portion of the Statement is an exception here: in *every* case the team's candidacy or accreditation recommendation must be explained.) **If the team recommendation is that a part of the current Statement be altered, it must clearly explain its reasons for recommending the suggested alteration. If the team's recommended version of a part of the Statement differs from the institution's requested version, the team will want to take special care in explaining its rationale.**

Essentially, the team's rationale for each of its recommendations will be a summary judgment supported by reference to the salient points discussed in the third section of the Team Report. In making recommendations concerning the first two parts of the Statement (the *Name* and *Control*), the team's choices will be both simple and clear. In deciding on its recommendations and rationale for the remaining parts of the Statement, the team faces more complicated choices.

Status. The first and most important decision the team must make is whether the institution should be granted or continued in candidacy or accreditation status. The Status portion of the Worksheet which the team receives from the Commission is the place where this decision is recorded. (Note: This section may *not* be altered by a focused visit.) The Worksheet describes the institution's current status and notes any changes in its status that the institution

has requested. The team may make one of four possible recommendations concerning the institution's status:

- *that candidacy or accreditation be granted or continued.* The team recommends this if it finds, and the third section of its report documents, that the institution meets the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation. The team summarizes its reasons for this positive decision in the rationale section of its report and then reflects its recommendation on the Statement Worksheet.

- *that accreditation be continued with probation.* The team recommends this if it finds, and the third section of its report documents, that while the institution currently meets the Criteria for Accreditation, specific and vital changes are necessary for it to continue to meet the Criteria. Probation is a public status which requires that an institution eliminate specified serious deficiencies within a specified period. The team summarizes its reasons for this recommendation by detailing the areas of concern that need to be improved within the rationale section of its report. It records its recommendation by (a) adding the note that "College X is on probation" to the Status portion of the Statement Worksheet, and (b) specifying the reports that should be filed or the evaluations that should be scheduled, the focus of these reports and/or evaluations, and their timing, in the appropriate sections of the Statement Worksheet.

- *that accreditation be denied but candidacy be continued.* The team recommends this if it finds, and the third section of its report documents, that an institution applying for accreditation before the expiration of its candidacy period does not meet the Criteria for Accreditation but continues to meet the Criteria for Candidacy. The team summarizes its reasons for this recommendation in the rationale section of its report and reflects it by indicating on the Statement Worksheet that the institution's status (candidacy) should remain the same. (In exceptional cases, the team may choose to recommend that an institution applying for accreditation at *the end* of its candidacy period be denied accreditation but have its candidacy extended for a limited time.)

- *that candidacy or accreditation be denied.* The team recommends this if it finds, and the third section of its report documents, that the institution does not meet the appropriate Criteria. In this case, the team is recommending that the institution be denied initial affiliation or that continued affiliation be withdrawn and, therefore, that the institution *no longer have* a Statement of Affiliation Status. Should the team make this determination, its recommendation sentence will be the one noted earlier; its reasons for this recommendation will be explained in the rationale section of its report; and it will indicate **"None"** in the Status portion of the Statement of Affiliation Status Worksheet.

Educational Programs. This part of the Statement should describe the institution's degree programs, should note that the institution offers courses for credit outside of its degree programs if such notation is required by the "Policy and Procedures for Offering Courses for Credit Outside of Degree Programs," and should indicate that the institution offers non-credit courses if this component of its educational program is substantial. (For a description of the categorization of degree types used in this section of the Statement, see *A Handbook of Accreditation,* pp. 33-34.) The team's recommendation concerning this part of the Statement will either be to retain the current version or to change it based upon information gathered during the visit or upon the institution's request. (Under the Commission's change policy, institutions will need Commission approval before adding degree types *not* listed here. The team should make sure, therefore, that its listing is complete.)

Locations. This part of the Statement should note the institution's main campus and any permanent off-campus sites where it offers courses in its degree programs. The team should distinguish between sites where degree programs can be completed and sites at which only courses are offered. The team should first check to see that the locations listed in this section are still in operation. It should then check if additional locations have been added or are contemplated. This part of the Statement may also list additional locations where the institution offers

various programs. Some institutions open and close such off-campus sites regularly. In such cases, the team has the responsibility to recommend whether and how these sites should be reflected in the Statement:

- *if the institution appears to have policies and procedures for managing such sites well, and if these policies and procedures appear to be working,* the team may choose to recommend that the Commission allow the institution wide latitude in making changes in locations. If this is the team's recommendation, the team summarizes its reasons for this judgment in the rationale section of its report and notes on the Statement Worksheet that the institution offers programs at its main campus, at specified permanent sites, "**and at various locations (within and/or outside of) the (district/state/United States).**"
- *if, on the other hand, the team believes that the institution should not be free to open and close its temporary off-campus sites without Commission review,* it should list each of the current sites in this part of the Statement Worksheet. Such a listing will require the institution to be examined under the Commission's "Policy on Changes Affecting the Affiliation Status of an Institution" before it changes these sites or adds others.

Stipulations. The team may recommend any stipulations that it finds, and the third section of its report documents, are justified. Stipulations are limitations placed on the institution's activities. They may include limitations on the development of new activities or new programs within the degree types specified in the **Educational Programs** portion of the Statement; limitations on the size, extent or location of certain of the institution's activities (e.g., the limitation that a particular doctoral degree program may only be offered at one site), and so forth. The team summarizes its reasons for these recommendations in the rationale section of its report and notes them on the Statement Worksheet by indicating that "**Its (candidacy/accreditation) is limited to (nature of limitation).**"

Reports Due. The team may recommend that the institution be required to file reports with the office

of the Commission between on-site evaluations if it finds, and the third section of its report documents, that such reports are warranted. The team may also recommend that a report currently scheduled to be filed should be eliminated if it believes that this is warranted. In deciding to require that reports be filed, the team must respect the following guidelines:

- the topic(s) to be addressed in a report must be clear, specific, and preferably no more than three in number
- the subject(s) of the report(s) must be able to be evaluated on the basis of written materials alone and must not require an on-site visit to be verified
- a specific date on which the report is to be filed must be indicated in the recommendation
- no more than three reports may be recommended by any team

The team may ask that a report be filed for a number of reasons: to provide information only, to monitor how an institution is progressing in coping with certain changes or concerns, or to determine whether a focused evaluation needs to be conducted. The team should specify in the rationale section of its report which of these purposes is behind its recommendation and should also indicate in that section what actions should follow receipt and analysis of the report(s). It should not request reports if the information needed to evaluate the area the report is to address cannot be presented *and* properly assessed on the basis of written information alone.

It is especially important that the team specify how the report should be used. It may want to indicate in the rationale of its report, for example, that a report should be filed on a certain date and that "unless the report shows . . . then . . . ." The team should clearly explain the basis for evaluating the report and the actions that the report should trigger.

The team reflects its recommendations on the institution's Statement Worksheet by noting that "**It is to file a report focused on (subjects) with the office of**

the Commission by (specific date, e.g., October 1, 1985)."

Focused Evaluations. The team may recommend that one or more focused evaluations be conducted before the next comprehensive evaluation if it finds, and the third section of its report documents, that such evaluations are warranted. Just as a written report should not be recommended when an on-site evaluation is really necessary, an on-site evaluation should not be recommended if a written report will suffice. And just as a focused evaluation should not be recommended when a written report will do, a focused evaluation should not be recommended when a comprehensive evaluation is necessary. If it decides that a focused evaluation is necessary, the team must respect certain guidelines:

- the subject(s) of the focused evaluation(s) must be specific, clear, and limited in number
- the date recommended for the evaluation is preferably not more than three years after the current evaluation
- the team should indicate what actions should follow the focused evaluation

The team reflects its recommendation on the Statement Worksheet by noting that "**An evaluation focused on (subjects) is scheduled for (academic year).**"

Comprehensive Evaluation. The team should recommend a time for the next comprehensive evaluation, whether it recommends additional focused visits or not. However, in some special situations where a focused evaluation has been recommended, the team may choose to recommend that the date of the next comprehensive evaluation be set by the team making the focused evaluation. In these situations the team should make clear in the **Focused Evaluations** section of the SAS that the team making the focused evaluation is charged with the responsibility of setting the date for the next comprehensive evaluation.

While most comprehensive evaluations occur at a fixed time specified in the Commission's official accrediting action, the Commission reserves the

right to alter the time of the next evaluation visit or to call for a comprehensive or focused visit to respond to changes that occur within an institution. An institution's candidacy or accreditation is *not guaranteed* for a specific period of time but expresses a continuing relationship between the Commission and the institution.

Commission policy requires that a comprehensive evaluation be scheduled *no later* than five years after an institution is granted initial accreditation, and that *every* institution affiliated with the Commission must undergo a comprehensive evaluation *at least* every ten years. Candidates for Accreditation must be evaluated biennially during their candidacy period.

The fact that focused evaluations may occur between comprehensive evaluations does not affect these minimum guidelines.

The Commission does not specify the bases for a team's deciding to recommend that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled in ten years or a shorter period of years. In making this recommendation, the team should weigh the concerns it has about the institution against its strengths, and by evaluating the adequacy of the resources and processes the institution has to respond to internal and external changes. The team explains its reasons for recommending the number of years it does in the rationale section of the report. It reflects its recommendation on the Statement Worksheet by noting that "**X College's most recent comprehensive evaluation occurred in 1983-1984. Its next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for (academic year).**"

Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. Before the on-site visit, the team will receive a copy of the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status from the Commission. The Worksheet will usually include any changes suggested or requested by the institution. In addition, a copy of the Worksheet, completed by the institution, should be bound into its self-study report. The team indicates its recommendations by specifying the wording it suggests for each part of the Statement. If it recommends a change, it specifies that change, using the

wording discussed above, in the space provided on the Worksheet; if it recommends no change, it indicates that by writing "**(NO CHANGE)**" in the appropriate space.

The Format of the Team Report

The Team Report should be typed, double-spaced, on 8.5 by 11 bond paper. The name of the institution should appear at the top left of each page, the page number at the top right. Left-hand margins should be wide enough to allow for holes to be punched so that the report may be placed in a binder if that should be necessary during the review process. The team chair should send the Commission the **original** of the final report with the Statement Worksheet attached, rather than a copy, since the original will allow the numerous copies the Commission must make of the report to be clearer. The title page should follow the format of the sample on page 38.

The Draft Team Report

As explained earlier, team members submit their written contributions to the Team Report to the team chair, either at the end of the on-site visit or within a week or so after it. When all of these written materials have been received, the team chair prepares the draft report.

The draft should be completed and distributed within ***one*** *month of the on-site visit.* The team chair concludes the report with the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status containing the team's recommendation. The team chairperson then mails a copy of the draft report to the chief executive officer of the institution, the members of the team, and the Commission staff person who has coordinated the visit for their comments and corrections. The draft should be clearly marked on the title page "**Draft for correction of errors of fact only – for internal distribution at the discretion of the chief executive officer.**" The staff of the Commission will review the Statement Worksheet and notify the team chair of any changes in wording that need to be made.

The Final Team Report

Upon receipt of the comments of the chief executive officer, the team members, and the Commission staff, the team chair prepares the final Team Report. If the comments suggest that substantive changes may have to be made in the draft, the team chair may need to confer by telephone with the members of the team before preparing the final version. The Statement of Affiliation Status Worksheet incorporating any changes in wording that have been suggested by the staff is attached to the final Team Report and is the team's formal recommendation

for Commission action. When the final report is completed, the team chair sends it to the Commission staff member. **The final Team Report is due in the office of the Commission *no more than six weeks* after the on-site visit.**

The office of the Commission duplicates the final report and mails copies of it to the chief executive officer and the team members. Additional copies are also prepared for later distribution during the review processes of the Commission.

The chief executive officer of the institution is asked to review the Team Report, including the team's recommendation and to make a formal written response to the staff member of the Commission. This response, which is shared with the team chair, becomes part of the written record of the evaluation which is forwarded to the Readers' Panel and/or the Review Committee, and to the Commission.

A SAMPLE STATEMENT WORKSHEET
(for an institution required to appear before a Review Committee)

WORKSHEET FOR STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

INSTITUTION:	**JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE** 1100 South State Street Chicago, IL 60605
TYPE OF REVIEW:	A comprehensive evaluation for initial accreditation at the Master's (professional) degree-granting level
DATE OF THIS REVIEW:	October 8-10, 1984
DATE OF SAS:	February 18, 1983
CONTROL:	John Dewey College is a private, not-for-profit institution.
Institution	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)
Team	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
STATUS:	John Dewey College is a candidate for accreditation with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
Institution	Recommended Wording: John Dewey College is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.
Team	Recommended Wording: John Dewey College is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:	The College offers programs leading to the Bachelor's (arts and sciences and professional curricula) and Master's (professional curricula) degrees.
Institution	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)
Team	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
LOCATIONS:	The College's degree programs are offered at its campus in Chicago and at off-campus sites in Moline and Galena, Illinois.
Institution	Recommended Wording: The College's degree programs are offered at its campus in Chicago and at off-campus sites in Moline, Galena, and Dixon, Illinois.
Team	Recommended Wording: The College's degree programs are offered at its campus in Chicago and at off-campus sites in Moline, Galena, and Dixon, Illinois.
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
STIPULATIONS:	None.
Institution	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)

Team	Recommended Wording: The College must seek approval from the Commission before initiating any new Bachelor's or Master's degree programs.
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
REPORTS REQUIRED:	None.
Team	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
FOCUSED EVALUATIONS:	None.
Team	Recommended Wording: (NO CHANGE)
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:
COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS:	John Dewey College's most recent comprehensive evaluation occurred in 1982-83. Its next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 1984-85.
Team	Recommended Wording: John Dewey College's most recent comprehensive evaluation occurred in 1984-85. Its next comprehensive evaluation is scheduled for 1989-1990.
Review Committee	Recommended Wording:
Commission	Recommended Wording:

A SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

REPORT OF A VISIT

TO

JOHN DEWEY COLLEGE
Chicago, Illinois

October 8-10, 1984

for the

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

of the

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

Charles S. Pierce, Chairperson of the Humanities Division, Fitzgerald College, St. Paul, MN 55422

Willard Gibbs, Professor of Mathematics, Oppenheimer University, Los Alamos, NM 87105

Elizabeth Peabody, Professor of Social Science and Director of Elementary Education, Curti College, Madison, WI 53703

Emma Willard, Dean of the College of Education, Hutchins University, Aspen, CO 80303 (CHAIRPERSON)

V. The Team and The Review Process

Once they have submitted their comments on the draft report, team members' responsibilities for the Commission assignment are fulfilled. They will receive a copy of the final report and will be notified of the final action taken by the Commission, but they are represented during the review processes of the Commission by the team chair. Should they be contacted by someone from the institution they have visited with questions or comments, they should refer that person to the Commission or the team chair. **Under no circumstances** should they discuss the details of the team's deliberations or try to speak for the team.

The team chair continues to be involved in the institution's evaluation throughout the review process. If the evaluation is considered by a Review Committee and the team chair is unable to appear, a team member may be asked to represent the team at a Review Committee session.

The Readers' Panel

If the institution chooses to have its case considered by a panel of readers, the team chair is informed of the readers' responses to the Team Report. The Readers' Panel process has one purpose: to determine whether further discussion with a Review Committee is likely to lead to the alteration of the team's Statement of Affiliation Status recommendation. In making their judgments, readers consider the following questions: Is the team's recommendation adequately supported by factual information in the team report and institutional documents? Do the institution's report and supporting documents contain information that is not addressed in the team report, and which might significantly affect the recommendation for action? Does the institution's response indicate significant disagreement with the team's recommendation, making further review desirable? Does the institution's response contain significant new information that is likely to change the recommendation?

If at least two of the three readers believe that Review Committee consideration *is not likely* to alter the team's recommendation, the team recommendation is forwarded directly to the Commission for action. The Commission then has the option of accepting the team's recommendations **or** referring the institution to a Review Committee for further consideration.

If at least two of the three readers believe that the Review Committee consideration *is likely* to alter the team's recommmendation, the institution is referred to the next regularly scheduled Review Committee session.

The Review Committee

If Commission policy requires that the institution's materials be considered by a Review Committee, if the institution chooses to appear before a Review Committee, or if the Readers' Panel recommends further consideration by a Review Committee, the team chair is asked to join the chief executive officer of the institution and the Committee to discuss the team's report and the on-site visit.

Through studying the documents connected with the evaluation visit and through informal discussion with the team chair and the CEO, the Review Committee judges whether the visiting team's recommendation is well-founded in fact, fair, and in agreement with the policies and procedures of the Commission. In cases where there is a disagreement between the institution and the team, the Committee seeks to understand the difference of opinion and resolve it. The members of the Review Committee may ask the team chair to elaborate on something in the Team Report, to explain the deliberations that led to a particular recommendation, or to react to institutional materials that may have been submitted in response to the Team Report.

The Review Committee then meets in closed session to consider the information it has gained from the team chair and the CEO, and arrives at its own accrediting recommendation. That recommendation may be to support the visiting team's recommendation in full or to suggest modifications in it.

Following the Review Committee sessions, the Review Committee's recommendation is communicated to the team chair and the chief executive officer. Both are invited to respond in writing to the Review Committee recommendation. Should a Review Committee change

the team recommendation, the team chair may choose to poll the team before sending a response. If there is disagreement by the team and/or the institution with the Review Committee recommendation, these comments are presented to the Commission along with the institution's materials, the Team Report and recommendation, and the Review Committee's recommendation.

The Commission then has the option of accepting or altering the team and Review Committee recommendations. The Commission's accrediting decision is communicated to all members of the visiting team and the team chair shortly after it is taken.

Following-up on Reports Requested

At the conclusion of the review processes of the Commission, the team chair's responsibilities for this assignment end unless the team has requested that reports be filed with the office of the Commission. If reports are to be filed, the staff may ask the team chair to help review the reports when they arrive. It is sometimes difficult for the staff of the Commission to judge whether a report provides the information that the team thought should be submitted; occasionally, the staff will be unclear about what the team had in mind or will want to have the team chair's reaction to the report.

In these cases, the team chair will be sent a copy of the institution's report and will be asked to comment on whether it satisfies the intent of the team's recommendation. The team chair's response to the report is then made part of the staff member's analysis of the report, which is sent to the institution, the team chair, and the Commission.

VI. Focused Evaluations

The information on planning, conducting and reporting the results of an on-site visit which appears in the preceding pages of this *Manual* is necessary reading for every team undertaking an evaluation for the Commission. Focused evaluations alter the scope of the institution's preparation and materials for the visit, as well as those of the team's evaluation and report. As Chapter V of *A Handbook of Accreditation* explains, focused evaluations occur between comprehensive ones, and examine only certain aspects of an institution. They restrict themselves to those and related aspects, and are meant to monitor developments, changes or concerns between comprehensive visits. In most respects, the policies and procedures governing such evaluations are similar to those governing comprehensive evaluations; however, there are a number of significant differences.

The first of these is that the role of the visiting team is different from that of a team conducting a comprehensive evaluation. The focused evaluation team is not charged with evaluating whether an institution fulfills the Criteria for Candidacy or the Criteria for Accreditation; nor is it empowered to recommend that candidacy or accreditation be granted, continued or denied. Its role, instead, is to evaluate the area(s) specified in the focus of the visit, and to provide the Commission with a progress report on developments at the institution since the last comprehensive evaluation.

Planning the Visit

In preparation for a focused evaluation, an institution does not undertake a full-scale self-study; nor does it prepare a Self-Study Report of the kind referred to in the Commission's *Handbook* and *Guide*. It prepares a Focused Report, which addresses only the areas to be evaluated. It will *not* be organized around the Criteria as self-study reports are. (For further information on the focused report, see Chapter VI of *A Guide for Self-Study and Evaluation.*)

Before the visit, the Commission sends team members an Evaluation Visit Summary Sheet, a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status, and copies of the most recent comprehensive evaluation report and any subsequent focused evaluation reports. The institution sends each member of the team a copy of its focused report and any supporting materials it believes the team should have before arriving on campus, relevant portions of the Basic Institutional Data Forms, and faculty and student handbooks.

The team chair proceeds as he or she would for a comprehensive evaluation: by initiating contact with the institution and the team, coordinating arrangements for the visit, and communicating the plan for the visit to both the institution and the members of the team.

Conducting the Visit

Focused evaluations are usually two-day visits. At the first team meeting, the chairperson reviews the purpose of the visit; formulates final assignments for interviews and report writing; and covers the other relevant parts of the outline discussed in Chapter III.

The focused evaluation team is principally concerned *not* with the institution as a whole but with the aspects specified for the focused evaluation (e.g., enrollment patterns, finances, building program, curriculum development). Therefore, the data needed by the team are more circumscribed than those data needed for a comprehensive evaluation. The team's time on campus is limited, and it will need to direct its energies primarily toward gathering the data it needs for dealing with its areas of focus. Its fundamental purposes are to determine whether the institution has addressed the area(s) of concern and to assess the impact of significant changes related to them. However, if matters outside the focus of the visit come to the attention of the team it should note these, recommending changes in the Statement of Affiliation Status to deal with these additional areas, if appropriate.

Writing the Report

The team summarizes its findings concerning these matters in a written report. While every focused report is different, each must contain four essential elements. Three of these essential elements are the same as those in a comprehensive report; one is different. Every focused report must:

- provide certain matters of information
- offer advice and suggestions related to the area(s) of focus to the institution
- assess the area(s) of focus
- conclude with the team's formal recommendation and its rationale for that recommendation.

The first and second of these essential elements are identical to those discussed at length in Chapter IV of this *Manual;* the third essential element of a focused report differs from that of a comprehensive report because of the differences in purpose between comprehensive and focused evaluations; the fourth essential element is basically the same as that discussed in Chapter IV.

Since a focused team does not evaluate the entire institution, the third essential element of its report is not an examination of the institution in relation to the Criteria. Instead, the third section of a focused report is directed to the area(s) of focus.

If the focused visit was **required by a previous evaluation**, the team's responsibility is to assess whether the institution has made progress in the area(s) and to report significant developments since the last Commission visit. If the focused evaluation was **prompted by a proposed change in the institution's Statement of Affiliation Status**, the team's responsibility is to evaluate whether the proposed change should be approved. (For further information on institutional change, see Chapter VII of *A Handbook of Accreditation.*) This section of its report should be detailed enough to allow readers to understand the most important changes the institution has undergone or is planning, and to evaluate how well the institution has responded to previous Commission concerns.

Like the report of a comprehensive evaluation, the report of a focused evaluation concludes with a fourth essential element: the team's recommendation. And, like the comprehensive team report's, the focused report's recommendation has three parts: a standard recommendation sentence, a rationale, and a Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status.

The recommendation sentence for every focused evaluation is the same:

The team's recommendations for action concerning College X are shown on the attached Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. The reasons for the team's recommendations are:

The recommendation sentence is followed by a section in which the team states its rationale for each of its specific recommendations. The team does this by discussing its suggested version of each part of the Worksheet for the Statement of Affiliation Status. Since an institution's status with the Commission can only be altered as a result of a comprehensive evaluation, the focused evaluation team may make no recommendation concerning the Status section of the worksheet. It may recommend changes in any of the other sections of the Statement; in each case, it follows the guidelines discussed in Chapter IV.

A Note On Special Cases

Sequential Visits. In most cases, visits to institutions with off-campus programs or sites follow the patterns described earlier in this *Manual*. Establishing the logistics of the visit may require a pre-visit by the team chair, and conducting the evaluation may involve team members separating for part of the visit to examine different sites—but the basic structure of the team visit remains the same.

In some cases, however, an institution may have so many sites, so widely dispersed within and outside of its home state, the North Central region, and/or the United States that a sequential visit conducted over a longer period of time is required to thoroughly evaluate the institution and its operations. Sequential visits require that the Commission and the institution agree on an appropriate evaluation design and that team members be willing to commit themselves to a longer period of time away from their home campuses than is required for other types of visits. Team members who agree to serve on sequential visits receive additional information on the particulars of the visit from the Commission staff.

Joint Visits. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education conducts joint visits with several other institutional accrediting associations. These visits are conducted by teams representing each of the associations involved in the visit and require coordination between the Commission's evaluator(s) and their counterparts from these other associations. In some cases, the team will be chaired and the final report will be written by evaluators from the other associations; in others, the Commission will appoint the team chair. Occasionally, sequential visits will also be joint visits, but often joint visits will only differ from regular Commission visits because of the composition of the visiting team. Consultant-evaluators who agree to serve on a joint visit will also receive additional information from the Commission.

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